

THE R

SECOND ANNIVERSARY
BENEFIT PARTY!

WITH

SAT. JUNE 15

RING OF FIRE

PAPER DOLLS

AND FROM KNOXVILLE
ARBITRARY

MUSIC STARTS AT 9:30

1901 BROADWAY

RING OF FIRE

WOW! THIS IS GOING TO BE ONE GREAT NIGHT OF NEW MUSIC, FEATURING 3 OF NASHVILLE'S BEST NEW BANDS AND OUR SPECIAL GUESTS FROM KNOXVILLE, THE ARBITRARIES. HERE'S SOME INFO FOR THOSE OF YOU WHO HAVEN'T HEARD THEM:

THE PAPER DOLLS ATTRACT A LOT OF ATTENTION AS NASHVILLE'S FIRST ALL FEMALE BAND. THEIR SONGS HARKEN BACK TO THE JOYFUL SOUNDS OF THE EARLY 60'S AND THEY'RE A TREAT FOR THE EYES AS WELL AS THE EARS.

RING OF FIRE CONSISTS OF BOTH VETERAN AND NOVICE MUSICIANS OF NASHVILLE'S ROCK RENESSANCE AND ARE ONE OF THE HOTTEST BANDS AROUND. THEY BLEND TRADITIONAL ROCK ELEMENTS WITH A HIGH-ENERGY PUNK SOUND HAS BEEN COMPARED TO DREAM SYNDICATE'S, AND N.I.R. IS PROUD TO WELCOME THEM AS OUR OUT-OF-TOWN GUESTS.

THE ARBITRARIES HAVE PLAYED HERE BEFORE AND IMPRESSED LISTENERS THROUGHOUT THE SOUTH. THEIR NEO-PSYCHEDELIC 60'S PUNK SOUND HAS BEEN COMPARED TO DREAM SYNDICATE'S, AND N.I.R. IS PROUD TO WELCOME THEM AS OUR OUT-OF-TOWN GUESTS.

SHADOW 15 ARE ONE OF NASHVILLE'S MOST POPULAR NEW BANDS; PLAYING SINCE FALL OF '83 THEY PLACED SECOND IN OUR READERS' POLL FOR BEST NEW BAND. THEY PLAY FAST AND TIGHT GARAGE ROCK, CREATING A SPLENDID WEB OF SOUND THAT PENETRATES THE MIND AND GETS THE FEET MOVING.

BE THERE, ALCHA.

WHITE LIGHT WHITE LIGHT WHITE LIGHT WHITE LIGHT WHITE LIGHT WHITE LIGHT

MAY 1984
SUBURBS
CLASH



LONG RIDERS

GREEN ON RED

DEAR READERS,
HI THERE! YES, IT'S BEEN A LONG
TIME BETWEEN ISSUES. I'M SORRY,
BUT I HAD TO FINISH UP MY SCHOOLING.
N.I.R. IS BACK, HOWEVER, AND IS VERY
HAPPY TO HAVE SURVIVED TWO YEARS.
THIS ISSUE IS A JAW-FACED FOUR PAGER
THAT CLEANS OUT OUR BACK INTERVIEWS
WITH VARIOUS CUT-OFF-THE BANDS. I
ALSO THERE WAS MORE LOCAL STUFF BUT
THERE JUST MASN'T ROOM. OUR NEXT
ISSUE SHOULD BE OUT IN 3 WEEKS AND
WILL SPOTLIGHT THE BANDS WHO ARE
PERFORMING AT OUR JUNE 2 BENEFIT, AS
WELL AS HAVING INTERVIEWS WITH CH-CK,
GET SHANT!, AND ICE "KING" GARRASCO.
WELL, ENOUGH OF THIS. THANKS AGAIN
FOR CUR SUFFICIENCY. HAPPY READING,
I'LL SEE YOU AT THE BENEFIT!
---ANDI



EDITOR'S NOTE: Well, it looks like the latest phase of the post '76 "new music" explosion has come to an end. I'm talking about the so-called "paisley wave" of neo-psychodelia that descended upon us last year. A couple of great bands did emerge (i.e., Bangles, Dream Syndicate) but the countless others who tried to jump on the bandwagon have had their one moment of fame and (I hope) will now fade to black. What follows are reviews of the LONG RIDERS /GREEN ON RED show at Cantrell's that confirm the above. For those of you who still are interested in these bands, we've also included an interview with the lead guitarist/vocalist of the LONG RIDERS, Sid Griffin. Enjoy our criticism.

GREEN ON RED REVIEW BY JIM RIDLEY

"When I reached inside my mind and pulled out a feeling," writes lead vocalist/songwriter Dan Stuart of West Coast psychedelic outfit Green On Red in "Over My Head". "I couldn't help but be surprised"; if he reached inside his mind and pulled out an original feeling, I couldn't help but be surprised. For Green On Red, the Paisley Wave psychedelic movement (which Stuart claims is "bullshit") darlings who played Cantrell's April 29, is one of the most derivative bands to come along in the past few years, displaying its influences like dime-store mannequins.

The symptoms were apparent from the moment Stuart took the stage for a number with the Long Ryders. Called to the mike, Stuart staggered onto the tiny stage like a wounded antelope, grabbing the mike as if he were supposed to mop the floor with it. Within minutes he gave the audience a whole repertoire of imitations, tossing his head the way Jim Morrison used to, an insolent sneer and monotonous delivery ala Lou Reed, and twitching limbs and tortured howls that could have been Iggy Pop or Joe Cocker. Stuart danced with all the grace of a scout trying to stamp out a campfire, and his singing was so devoid of energy or feeling that the number seemed interminable.

Once back with his own band Stuart started showing some vital signs. He dropped a lot of the goofy mannerisms that had infested his performance with the Ryders and concentrated on singing and, uh, guitarizing. His voice grew less affected and more effective, and by the seventh song, Green On Red was sounding tight, uncluttered and downright powerful, but to get to that point the audience had to endure some truly awful material; the first song of Green On Red's 75-minute set was a lumbering "ballad" called "Practice What You Preach", and it was true a sermon of boredom, as Stuart's droning guitar and vocals drooled on and on. The next few songs were equally lame, hampered by the excessive frenzy of Chris Cacavas' organ runs, which smothered many of Stuart's vocals, which may or may not have been a good thing considering how bad Green On Red's lyrics are.

About six songs out, though, Green On Red ricked up momentum and began claving like a real band. Although they still wore all their influences—Blonde on Blonde-era Dylan, the Beatles, and, most heavily of all, the Doors—on their sleeves, Green On Red crackled into life with a good version of "That's What You're Here For" and grew progressively stronger. The show climaxed with a stunning version of "Narcolepsy", the best song on their spotty 12-song Clash LP. Here, the hypnotic groove of keyboards, guitar, and drums had the mesmerizing effect the band had sought all night. Stuart's yowling guitar solo was amazing, building and building until it exploded into a wall of apocalyptic feedback; Cacavas constructed a solid wall of screech with his keyboards, creating a densely textured spiraling sound. Unfortunately, that was the last song.

Two agonizing minutes of feedback introduced the encore, an intriguing rendition of Neil Young's "Like A Hurricane" on which drummer Alex Machioli, whose strong percussion kept the band's sound from degenerating into mush for the first part of the show, did his best work, moving the rest of the band along to the frenetic conclusion.

Green On Red has a lot of good ideas and an interesting sound, but if they are to progress, they need to vary their approach somewhat; most of Stuart's singing consists of yelps on the last word of every line, and the band still sounds too much like the Doors for comfort. These guys do have talent, and their next album will be crucial in determining whether they'll start sounding like a real band rather than the Hit Parade of 1969. Don't expect to hear too much of Green On Red on WRVU anymore, though. The band celebrated their Cantrell's show by partaking of some controlled and uncontrolled substances at 91 Rock under the guise of an interview, and somehow screwed around with the transmitter until the station was broadcasting on only 39 watts (that's illegal), got one dee-jay fired (that's stupid), and were promptly thrown out of WRVU (that's funny). Can KIX 104 and Coyote McCloud be too far behind?

LONG RIDERS- REVIEW AND INTERVIEW BY DUANA CALLAHAN

The Long Riders came out with a loud, powerful sound that immediately met with approval from the audience. Their music was of a 60's rejuvenation nature—a blend of old rock-and-roll sound and new-found energy. Sometimes the energy actually did catch on and the music was quite interesting, as on such tunes as "Join Our Gang" and "Last Night". The guitar work of Steve McCarthy was good, especially on "And She Rides", a pseudo-Allman Brothers' type tune, and their country/western numbers. Yet, most of the time I got the feeling the Long Riders were more concerned with producing a particular sound than making really good, enjoyable music. Most of the time the music seemed like a conscious, but fairly mediocre, attempt at 60's rock reincarnation. For me, it was sort of like seeing the Back Doors or an Elvis impersonator. Imitation is okay, but it has to be done with caution so as to justice to the person, or even the era, imitated. At times, the Long Riders actually not through, even to those of us too young to have enjoyed the

PAISLEY WAVE WASHES OUT

2



Long Ryders

Long Ryders influences. Most of the time, however, the Long Ryders were a disappointment all the way around and their intentions were lost on the audience.

NIR: How long have the Long Ryders been playing together as a band?

Sid: Oh, about two and a half years.

NIR: When did Tom Stevens, your new bass player, join?

Sid: Tom just joined, around Christmas time. We have a tendency to lose bass players. The guy before Tom got married and his wife was going to have a baby so she made him quit. Tom's married and his wife is about to have a baby too, but maybe she doesn't mind too much, I dunno.

NIR: How do you describe your music?

Sid: Acid/garage country, anything like that. I don't care if it's accurate, as long as it's funny like Groucho says, "You can call me anything but late to dinner." (laughs). I like Groucho...

NIR: Back to your music, do you really think it sounds all that country?

Sid: No, not in Nashville. Of course, it doesn't strike people in Nashville that way, but in L.A. it's a different story.

NIR: The Long Ryders are usually referred to as a California band, what do you think about that?

Sid: Well, I'm from Kentucky; Steve's from Richmond, Virginia, Tom's from Indiana. So we've got one from California, Greg, he's from Hollywood.

NIR: But you're generally identified with California and its scene, why is that?

Sid: Well, we live there, but that's not where we're from. We emulate and take aspects of our sound from there. People think we're a California band, but we're not, though a lot of the bands we emulate are. We don't want to sound a lot like the Byrds or Buffalo Springfield, but there's no denying that a lot of our sound is taken from that era. We're a California band in the same way that Jason & the Scorchers are a Nashville band. Let's face it, Jason plays a kind of "souped up" country in that they play country and western the way the older established C & W bands would play if they were young now. The reason we don't sound exactly like the Byrds or others is 'cause we weren't born right after World War II. Consequently we've been influenced by stuff those people weren't.

NIR: How do you feel about your music being described as "psychedelic"?

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PETER GABRIEL, WAMM OF VOODOO, etc.
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*****AFTER PI' B*****

SQUARE DANCING



Sid: I don't think we really play psychedelic music. For one thing, our lyrics are fairly concrete, not a lot of that airy pie-in-the-sky nonsense. No, our music is closer to 60's garage punk, kinda like the Standells and the Byrds but played with the energy of the Circle Jerks and Sex Pistols.

NIR: How's it been, playing the South?

Sid: Well, we're not very popular down here. The crowds are the smallest, while in the West they're the largest. We're also catching on in the Northeast, 'cause they know who we are. Anyway, I'm

convinced that the future of this band—"making it" lies in the South and Mid-West. The music we play is a bigger deal in those areas as opposed to New York and the West Coast. Our future does not rest with those "hipsters", 'cause those "hipsters" will always turn from you for something new. Stuff is more lasting in the South; country music singers, after two or three hits, people never forget 'em, y'know.

NIR: What influenced you the most, as far as your music is concerned?

Sid: What essentially happened was Steve and I began by playing Byrds and Buffalo Springfield, a sort of country/rock hybrid, rock with an element of country. We heard the Sex Pistols, and while we realized we weren't punk we figured we'd inject that energy into what we were doing. That was a more realistic attitude, because we couldn't play punk any more than we could play good reggae. Who influenced us? Anybody who played the same stuff we do... It all depends on what you mean. Is Tom Petty anything like us? There are not many things that the Long Ryders like that are contemporary, actually. We hate MTV. They show very few artists I'm interested in. MTV is both sexist and racist.

They rarely play Rick James or Michael Jackson—mostly Culture Club or dance-schlock out of England. Why can't Teddy Pendergrass or Luther Vandross get on MTV? They get Grammies, but they'll never get on MTV.

NIR: What's your ultimate goal as a band?

Sid: The Long Ryders want to be successful enough at music that we can make a nice living, but not so successful that we have the problems associated with success on a higher plane, tax problems, lack of privacy, too much pressure, constant criticism, things like that which go with life at the top.

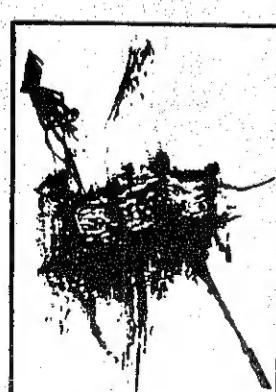
NIR: In closing, is there anyone in particular you want to reach with your music?

Sid: Yeah, anybody with any kind of heart or soul, regardless of race, religion, sex, or creed.

FACTUAL

FOR THE SONG

PSYCHOTIC ROMANCE
(REMIX)



FACTION .03

CAT'S RECORD'S AND TAPE'S 2814 WEST END NEW (and on sale)

R.E.M. INXS Dream Syndicate P-furs
George Jones Style Council
Imports → David Kennedy's Live
Buzz of Delight - oh-oh, Shactabilly
BLOOD ON THE SADDLE
New Order 12" Robert Görl (He's a german guy) Cocteau Twins 12"
Hell comes to your house Pt.2
The Method actors



I don't usually go out to the Brass A in Rivergate, but when I heard the SUBURBS were going to be there last month, I quickly drove the distance. The Suburbs have been one of my favorite bands to watch since their 1980 debut album, *In Combo*; recorded when they were just out of high school, it's got a lot of good songs and energy and has to be one of the best first albums of all time. Still, it rates in comparison to *Credit In Heaven*, their 1981 double album followup that was on every critic's best of list (or at least the hip critics). *Credit In Heaven* proved the Suburbs could write songs, and what songs they were: "Music For Boys", a great dance tune; the sloppy "Kacho Drunk"; and the crooning "Girlfriend". The group took their act on the road, winding up in L.A. for an extended stay in search of a recording contract with a major label. It paid off; they signed with Mercury and have released an EP (*Dream Hog*) and the long awaited *Love Is The Law*, one of last year's best unnoticed discs.

So, there I was at the Brass A with about 30 other people, only five of whom knew who the Suburbs were. In case you're wondering, they are: Hugo Klaers (drums), Michael Halliday (bass), Bruce Allen (guitar), Blaine John (Beej) Chaney (guitar/vocals), and Chan Poling (keyboards/vocals). The Suburbs music and songs are varied from DCR, standard pop, to smogges of crazed weirdness. They opened with a bouncy "Waiting", then launched into "Cigarette In Backwards", one of the weird ones, and most of the crowd left. Those that stayed got quite a treat; the band played almost two hours and covered their entire spectrum of songs and styles with lots of energy and showmanship. After the show I spoke with Beej who explained why they were at the Brass A rather than Cantrell's; it seems their new booking agency (which they're not going to be using in the future) didn't know what type of band they were and booked a cross-country tour of obscure bars the band has dubbed the "Twilight Zone" tour. Still, Beej said, they always play their heart out and try to attract fans. They know the road to rock success is a long and hard one, but the Suburbs have the patience, talent and dedication to make it happen. They were lots of fun to watch and talk to and hopefully next time they come through more of you will be able to see them. Here's the interview:

NIR: I guess we could start talking about the signing with Mercury, even though it's old news...

BEEJ: Yeah, it's old, but it's new still. They signed us with Dream Hog. We'd released it ourselves 'cause they'd passed on it at first. We released it ourselves anyway, and then they picked it up. The signing is kinda old, but it's still a new working relationship. We're just learning the big business end of things.

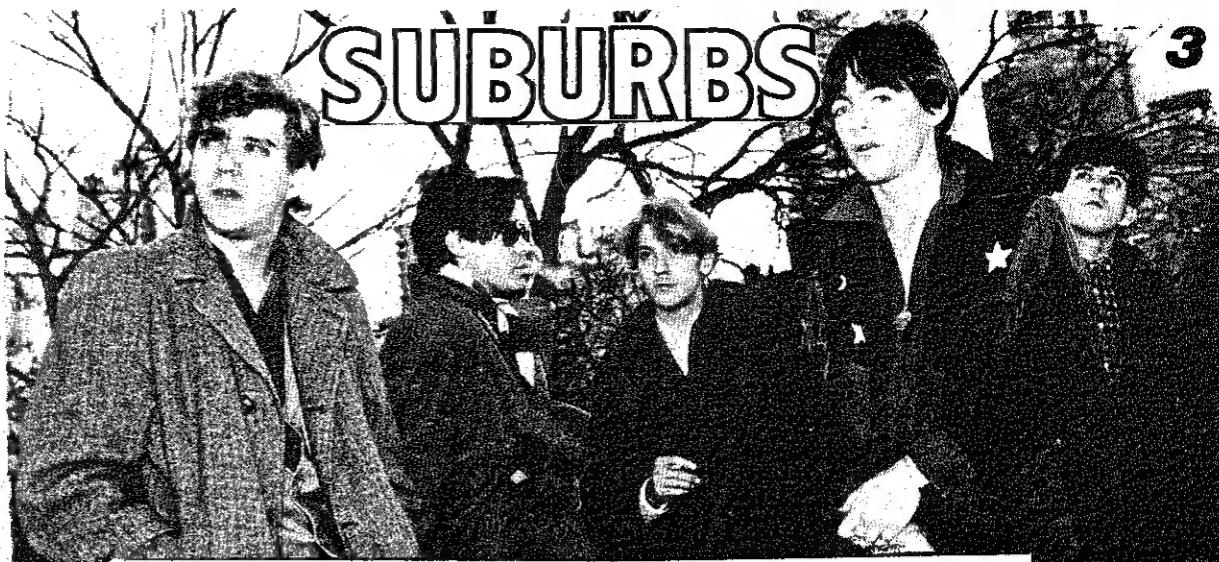
NIR: Were you trying to do anything different on *Love Is The Law* since it was your first major label album?

BEEJ: I don't think we were trying anything different that wouldn't have been done on Twin Tone (the band's old label) anyway. It didn't affect us that much, being on another label, as far as the music went. We were going in that direction, using horns, anyway, so the label didn't have a lot to do with the music itself.

NIR: I really thought they were good tonight; who are they?

BEEJ: Tom Burnadette and Kevin North. Yeah, they're great. Tom played on *Love Is The Law*, and Kevin has joined since then. They'll be on the new record too, so they're pretty permanent fixtures in our organization now.

NIR: What kind of image and attitude does the band try to get



Chan Poling, Hugo Klaers, Bruce Allen, Beej Chaney and Michael Halliday

across?

BEEJ: Real high energy, high awareness, high electricity. We enjoy playing high energy nightclubs, just getting down and getting the audience up dancing or whatever they're into and going from there. It's like an athlete who pushes himself to the absolute limit and then becomes extremely high from that, that's what we try to do.

NIR: I noticed a lot of people left when you started into your second song. Do you think the band's lyrics and unique song arrangements throw a lot of people?

BEEJ: Yeah, I think it takes a lot of people for a real surprise when they first hear us, but I think the more they get into it the more they find it's bordering on a lot of things that are racing through their heads. I think we have a lot of stuff people really appreciate when they get into it far enough to figure out what we're getting at. I think it shocks a lot of people at first, but then they're either taken by it right away, or it catches on and then they really enjoy it.

NIR: I've got to ask where the idea of "Credit In Heaven" came from; it's a great concept...

BEEJ: The whole concept of that record just came from working really hard at being a band, working really hard to stay together. That was kinda an in joke—we said, God, if we can get through all this we've got it; we must have credit in heaven. The songs of that period are based on experiences, all the ups and downs, ups and downs of the music business and our personal lives. I think it's really an album about being a young person in America today; being free, but not really free, being alive but not really being alive.

NIR: Tell me more about your lyrics, concepts, and attitudes.

BEEJ: That's one thing we've always tried to concentrate on,

because that's an important part of the whole essence of rock and roll, what the band is talking about. You can go out there and sing about love and make it real fluffy, and people can get real drunk and pass out, but there's a message in our songs, and hopefully it's a bit different for each person who listens to it. We think our lyrics are important...

NIR: To change the subject, I know that everyone in the band is married, how has that affected the Suburbs development?

BEEJ: It's actually really good; it keeps our personal lives together. We don't tend to wander from our base, which is our wives, our families, and our music, so we have it all in a tight thing that creates more of a serious working relationship. If you have a good personal life, you have a good professional life. I think that goes in any business, but especially the music business; you need some kind of stability to keep going, otherwise you'll probably drift off into obscurity. A lot of musicians get caught up in the lights, the women, the circus atmosphere; we're more into it for the music. We believe we have a real true music in us. We're true to ourselves and it comes out in our music.

NIR: What are the SUBURBS trying to accomplish with their music and songs?

BEEJ: I don't know...just trying to make people a little more aware of where they're at. I don't think we have a specific message other than to just think about what you're listening to, what you put on in the morning, what kind of job you have, and where you fit into society. I think a lot of our music's been ahead of its time, and we've suffered because of it, kinda, but it's catching up now and developed into a real strength of the band. —ANDY

Got a lot of local stuff to review this outing,
BALANCE—"Computers & Souls"/"Movie Stars"—Christian techno-pop from Nashville, TN? You better believe it, and what's more, BALANCE ain't bad. Poppy and catchy Styx/Journey type music, haunting vocals, and intelligent lyrics that don't preach at you but get their point across nonetheless (i.e. "What goes in/ is what comes out" from "Computers & Souls"). Worth checking out.

SUBURBAN BARQUE—*Surreal Estate*: This 7-song, 20 minute cassette is fairly representative of the band's techno-tribal sound (i.e. primitive bass and drum beats mixed with synth and other electronic effects) and has its good and bad points. Good: The great use of "found" vocals on "Name Your Poison" (from a radio call-in show) and "Up The Block" (from a Russian language Voice Of America radio broadcast) which combine with the music quite effectively ala Byrne and Eno's *Life In The Bush Of Ghosts* and "General Notes", whose lyrics are from Tennessee Dept. of Transportation highway blueprints. Bad: Hurry, dense, bass-heavy production detracts from the songs, and lyrics at times get a bit pretentious (i.e. "You're a victim of suburban values/a player in a modern game") and Lewis Lowery's deadpan delivery doesn't help much. Lots of potential here, however, so watch out for when these guys get into a real studio.

CIVIC DUTY—"Long Way To Heaven"/"Red Wing Bird"—Ed and Judy Fitzgerald and company deliver their best ever vinyl, living up to the potential displayed on "New China" on *Local Heroes*. The music and lyrics will sound a bit too MOR for some, but this is pleasant music it's hard to find fault with. This single and their much improved live shows once again make Civic Duty one local band that bears watching closely.

CHIP and the CHILTONS—*A Change of Heart*—"Boys and girls, can you say sexist, mediocre, and unoriginal?" "Chip and the Chiltons!" "Good, I knew you could." This 4-song EP is devoid of anything musically fresh, and the lyrics make Motley Crue sound progressive (i.e. "I looked at her and saw her wiggle", "On a scale/of one to beautiful/you would lie/on my bed"). Avoid!

The Wrong Band...

"I Live in my Car" b/w "Wrong Song"

The first vinyl release by Nashville's premier pop-of-the-80's band focuses on only one side of this multi-dimensional group...the lightweight, disposable side. Both cuts are easily accessible and safely satiric. I would have liked to have seen them put one of their more serious cuts on this disc. The result would have been a more representative example of what

The Wrong Band is all about, but for reasons unknown to me, they chose not to follow this route.

"I Live in my Car" is familiar to WAMU fans everywhere. The version on this single is virtually identical to the version on the "Local Heroes" cassette. Keyboardist Dr. X (aka Duane Rice) explained to me that the version on the single was mastered at a slightly faster speed though the difference was not apparent to me. The lyrics of this song are a humorous reminder of how auto-oriented our society has become...

"...before there were no cars (sic)
there was no human race,
just human beings sitting around..."

Ric Harman's voice, normally clear and precise, is filtered and compressed so that it sounds like it's pouring out of a cheesy car radio sitting next to you at a stop-light. Rice's keyboard textures shimmer like the chrome on this-years-model. The bass, drums, and guitar thud along like a rush-hour traffic jam.

"Wrong song" is known to all Wrong Band fans as their signature song. Lyrically it is nothing more than a play on the band's name interspersed with their slogan "You have a right to be Wrong." The vocals are self-consciously sarcastic (especially the harmony vocals that are thrown in liberally) and the music is loaded with hooks and a few nifty little synth effects. In short, an enjoyable cut, though not exactly memorable.

The Wrong Band waited a long time to release any vinyl. One can only hope that their next release (1) won't be so long in coming, and (2) will contain more diverse material.

-Allen Green

REVIEWS

BOHEMIA: LIVE & ON RECORD

Chicago's Bohemia have been through Nashville four times that I know of. The first two times were so-called "pick-up" gigs, meaning that Nashville just happened to be somewhere in between two "important" gigs, and "picking up" 10 or 15 dollars at Cantrell's was preferable to just killing time. But based on the strength of those early "pick-up" gigs, Bohemia has built a small but loyal Nashville following.

In January, Bohemia played their first "important" Nashville gig. It was a Friday night, Factual opened, and KDA advertised it (along with the following night's Love Tractor show). The turnout was fairly good, and Bohemia, no doubt, garnered quite a few more local fans... and more recently, garnered a slot as one of the "best regional bands" in the NIR 2nd annual reader's poll.

so why then was Bohemia booked on a SUNDAY night this time around? Whatever the reason, it was a mistake. As any Nashville clubgoer knows, Sunday nights are DEAD...only about 50 people made it out and it might not have been that many if there hadn't have been two opening bands, Suburban Baroque and In Pursuit. We can only hope that Bohemia doesn't give up on Nashville as a result. In spite of all this, Bohemia turned in an excellent performance. One has only to see this band play to know professionalism and class look like onstage. One day soon, Bohemia will be big. Carla Evonne, vocals, sax, synth, percussion, will be influencing a new generation of female vocalists who will be less concerned with cute stage mannerisms, than with delivering stunning vocal performances. Fast Frank, guitar, sax, vocals, etc. is the wit of the band. With eyes that look right through you, Frank epitomizes the psychotic rocker, while maintaining his cool, professional front. Zirbel, bass and vocals, is without a doubt, the bands foundation. His bass playing anchors the music firmly to the ground, while his stage presence provides the contrast necessary to highlight Frank's neurosis and Carla's finesse.

If you missed the show, I suggest you seek out a copy of their latest vinyl offering, "All The Way" b/w "Love Turns To Stone". (12", discos da tinga?) All of the elements of Bohemia's sound are there, splendidly captured in a studio setting. The sharp, yet harmonious sax, the driving electronic drums, the ethereal vocals, the churning guitar. This is, to my knowledge, Bohemia's first release in their current three-piece line up, and it's one you should definitely add to your collection.

AG

NASHVILLE INTELLIGENCE REPORT
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dess & u

john elliot • kim ervin • janes horn

CLASH Joe Strummer SPEAK

Editor's Note: England's prototype punks the Clash kicked off their American tour at Vandy's Memorial Gym on March 27 before a sold out audience of students and scenesters. Given the highly publicized falling out between founders Mick Jones and Joe Strummer, one question was on everyone's mind before the show: Could what was once "the only band that matters" still deliver the goods? After the show, it was hard to say one way or the other. It was certainly a great rock and roll show on a purely entertainment level--the band's energy never let up and the crowd was on their feet throughout the 90 minute set. The lighting and 10 TV sets on stage (displaying everything from the Marx Brothers to *Road Warrior*) augmented the band's delivery without detracting from the songs. New drummer Pete Howard was stunning as he pounded out the beat, and Mick's replacements, guitarists Vince White and Nick Sheppard, played their licks and the crowd well. The band did several new tunes (i.e. "This Is England" and "Are You Ready For War?") in their punk/funk style, as well as all the old thrash out faves, a substantial number of which were from the band's '77 debut LP. On the other hand, I missed Mick, rock star persona and all. The new Clash also took a while to get up to full speed; it wasn't until their 25 minutes of encores that I felt there was passion and intensity coming from the stage rather than a more or less greatest hits montage (minus Mick's tunes of course). My verdict: They sure ain't the only band that matters anymore, but don't write them off yet. The Clash is Strummer's band now, and one wonders where he will be leading the rest of the guys, but they're still worth watching and listening to. The interview that follows gives some hints. It's by Regina Gee and Duwana Calahan, was broadcast over KRVU and originally published in *Versus*, Vandy's literary mag, but due to the limited range of both, N.I.R. has arranged to print it here for our readers.

I'd like to ask you first of all about a quote that has been circulated in American magazines about The Clash wanting to get back to the job they'd intended. What is that job?

Well, I feel that, looking around at the scene, it doesn't seem any different than from when we started out in '77. I mean you've got groups that got nothing to do with the way people live; people on the street, people with no future, people who are finding it hard to feed themselves, people who can't find any entertainment or satisfaction; and there's no relation between the music that's being made, say by Duran Duran, or whatever's around these days that's popular, with the real, how it is to live. It's just like it was when we started out with Emerson, Lake and Palmer: they were up there, and we were down there, and how could we go onto their shows, and get off on what? It was just Pictures of an Exhibition by Mussorgsky. Big deal. There was nothing to do with the way it felt to be alive. There is a feeling — and our job is to accurately reflect the feeling of the dispossessed.

I mean, even in a university like this place here. No matter how many philosophy degrees or qualifications you manage to stack up — it doesn't matter how many you got — you're just as likely not to find a job as somebody who hasn't got any qualifications. You know, like people fight to stock shelves in supermarkets, with PhD's and stuff, and Bachelors of Science and stuff. It's a dead end. The Clash as a group is supposed to be a part of that scene, be aware of that scene; not be an escapist actor who goes off into "boy meets girl" or completely unrealistic songs. We're just a group. We've got no answers, but we've got questions. And these questions we want everybody to think about, 'cause I just feel that everyone just wants to take the easy way out, watch TV, put their feet up, and get blown to Hell by a nuclear bomb. That's as much as they want to get involved in this thing called life.

When you said in the quote that you wanted to get back to that, does that imply that you feel you have strayed from that in other albums?

Yeah, by the sound. I've always written the lyrics, and the lyrics have always been on that train. But the sound. I feel we began to do the flavor of the month rather than incorporate into our sound; because when we started, The Clash had a sound — a very basic, guitar, drum sound. I feel we've abandoned that by going flavor of the month. Like, "Let's do a calypso tune," or "Let's try a Mose Allison jazz number."

"Let's do a bluegrass number, or a Cajun number." It was the flavor of the month. And I want to retain our sound. I feel that once you've got a sound, it's a rare thing to get your own sound, and it's so easy to forget about it. I feel we've forgot about it, and I just want to get back to that all over again.

What made you go "flavor of the month?"

I don't know, it was like, well, we found out we could play. And in the studio with all the machines and all the limitless things you can do with them, you get carried away. Before you know where you are everything but the kitchen sink is overdubbed. And seeing those machines with 24 tracks, and each track is saying like "record on me, fill me up, put something on me," and you end up with 24 tracks of what, when you only really needed about eight. And I feel we got sucked up into that studio thing — I think every group does. But I feel I've come out the other side, and I'm not now into the studios at all.

Do you think you've come closer to accomplishing this initial goal since Mick Jones has left the band?

Well, I'm not sure we've accomplished anything yet. We're still young, about 33 shows into our second career, here. And that's why we haven't made any record, and I don't want to make a record until we've got a group that's a group. We just want to knock it together in front of people, get people's reactions. I think rock and roll should be lively. I'm bored stiff by all my competitors — they're

boring me stupid. Nothing bores me more than the albums of today. I just feel like, does it have to be so boring? Isn't there any way it can be lively and also stimulating to the mind?

I want to ask you, given what you've just said, what is the last album you were pleased with?

I was pleased with "Straight to Hell," and "Know Your Rights," and "Car-jammin'" and "Should I Go." I mean they were clear in what they were. But on side two, which had a lot of experimental things like "Death is a Star," "Acid Tan," and things like this, I feel didn't quite work. And I don't think it's good enough to release something that doesn't quite work. Maybe it was fifty percent good and fifty percent not so good. I don't think that's good enough anymore. I really think it should be a hundred percent good.

All records are full of filler these days. You get one good track, one decent track, and eight more tracks of disposable stuff, and it's not good enough. It's a waste of time.

How much control do you have over what's put on an album?

Completely total control. We can't blame anybody, except us.

What do you think the major differences are between the last album, *Combat Rock*, and the forthcoming album, that is, without Mick Jones and Topper Headon?

Well, I don't know. I got no idea what the album will be like. But I just want it to be packed with good things, no filler. The difference will be in that we used to write half the album and make the other half up on the spot, when we were in the studio like for *London Calling* and *Combat Rock*. But the next album, I want to do it like we did the first album; I want to know exactly what we're going to do before we go in there. Have it all written. And that's why we're playing stuff on the road, and we're bashing the songs into shape by playing them in front of people, so by the time we get to the studio, we're going to know what we want to sound like, and there is less chance that it gets perverted or warped.

I think it is more artistic, more creative to say "yes" or "no". On some of our records we said "why not" when we should have said "no." Shall we put the sound of this thing falling down the stairs on it? Why not? The more the merrier was our philosophy. And I think this is artistic sloppiness, and we should be mean, and mean, and mean.

To some people, *Combat Rock* was the most commercial album that The Clash ever put out. Was it intended that way?

No, we don't even think about what we're going to do before we go in there. I feel sometimes people think it's all part of a master plan, and you sit down like a board meeting of a giant corporation, and you plan out your next thing with a sort of cold, ruthlessness. Really, you just go in with a bunch of songs, half of them written, and half of them you make up on the spot; and you see how it comes out. *Combat Rock*, that album was a real mess when we finished it. I mean, there were reels and reels of tape. It was hard to make head nor tail of it — it went on for hours. We had to take it to Glyn Johns, an outside producer, to give it someone who knew nothing about it, and he just mashed it into shape in a week, and that's how it came out.

There's no big plan on the way of the sound. We got slagged off to Hell in Britain for *London Calling*, because they all said "Ahh, they've made a record for American radio—cunning career move!" The whole fact was that we decided there were so many punk bands jumping on the bandwagon, it was becoming unbearable; so many imitators. We just decided to leave it alone; we decided to just play. And then we went on tour and left it with an engineer and a producer who produced it up, and so that was one album that we had very little to do with the sound of, 'cause we were working hard and we thought we'd do it that way. We never thought it would swing on American radio — we were far too naive.

Were you pleased when it happened?

That we hit in America? Pleased, we were more than pleased! It was desperation city — if we hadn't hit America, we'd have gone down the pan, because we owed so much dollar to the company, and certainly we weren't getting it back in England; in Germany they wouldn't even spit on us, much less buy our records. If we hadn't hit it in America, we'd have been down the pan.

Through your presentation of politically oriented music, do you generally hope to change the political thought of most people?

You're damn right! The thing is, listen, I'm not going to lay down the law and say you must think this way or you must think that way. All I'm begging people to do is to think at all, 'cause nobody cares to think. They think money is old people's business. I want to bring it back to that radicalism of the 60's when people said "it's our business to stop the Viet Nam War." They felt personally responsible for what was happening. Young people seem to think that "oh, it's for the old people to run the world." But I disagree with that, I think that's drug addict talk.

That's why we're coming down against drugs, because I believe we can control what's going to happen.

Are you trying to produce a result from your music rather than trying to find an outlet for your political unrest?

Yeah, exactly. Maybe that's a dumb move, but that's what we're trying to do.

What's more important to you right now, the medium or the message? Do songs come first or is it just a way to tell people something?

No, I'm a singer before I'm anything. All I am is a rock and roll singer who believes that lyrics should deal with real life. I'm not a politician using rock and roll songs toward some wicked end. I come to think the music must have a message to make it vital 'cause I saw the true nature of capitalistic society, I say justice wasn't justice, and the police were for whoever could buy them, and corruption was corruption. I saw all that, and I feel it's hypocrisy the way we go on about the Western world, freedom of speech.

In England, they're so secretive you can't even get the menu of a government cafeteria, it's double classified. I mean, we've got a lot of work to do in England on that score. It's unbelievable. And here, 92 percent of the American population don't even know where Nicaragua is or anything about it. And meanwhile your people are pouring in across the Honduran border tonight shooting people up.

How do you feel about the infiltration of electronics into modern music? Do you ever intend to use that, or do you think it would detract from the sort of raw sound that makes your political statement more effective?

I feel like a hillbilly farmer when I see all these Simmons kits and all these noises coming out of computer linked, pulse linked keyboards. One guy with one finger sounding like ten philharmonic orchestras. You know, I feel like a hillbilly farmer, and my first instincts is to get all that stuff and burn it, but then again I draw back on my second line thinking and think "well, you know, whatever need be." Whenever you hear Grand Master Flash's "The Message," you know that electronics can be used with a bit of soul. And maybe I agree with Herbie Hancock, who says it depends on who's using the machines.

What kind of music would you take to a desert island if you could take three albums?

Obviously, I'd take Motown record, because you never get tired of it. And then I'd take maybe a Hank Williams record, and then I'd take George Gershwin, I think.

A lot of people have called in wanting to know how you feel about punk.

The trouble with punk is that it became guessology. What I mean by that is that it became purist, clique, cultist, and all that stuff — it became into a waste of energy. You had to wear all this stuff, and rules. When we first started, what we were saying was to Hell with the rules, anything goes. And so it should. Let's have individuality, spontaneity, madmen...but it developed into another set of rules, as if we needed them.

I don't care if a person is a punker or not; the question is are they active, are they involved with the human race? Or are they closed off in some rathole. A lot of punkers are very cynical, very snobbish. I don't know if you have that word in America, inverted snobbery — I'm dirtier than you, I'm poorer than you, I've got more studs on my leather jacket than you.

I don't want to deal with any hypocrisy.

Many of your songs deal with revolution of one form or another. Do you believe in revolution?

I believe in a thinking revolution. I don't believe in enforcing a new regime with the power of arms on an unprepared people who ain't ready for it. Before you have revolution, you've got to have education. The trouble with the Soviets was that they took power, and in order to preserve that power they've had to enforce a police state. I think that if you educate people enough into thinking revolution, you wouldn't need such facistic machinery to uphold a state. I believe in changing the economic order of the world, but I ain't going to do it by force, ordering people around at the end of a sting gun.

How did you decide who would replace Mick Jones and Topper? Did you already have someone in mind?

No, by audition. Put an ad in the paper, and see what turns out. That's the only way to do it, because then it's all comers. All comers. I like that. It's not restricted to some untouchable clique, pop-star buddy-buddies. Let all comers have a crack. We let like 200 drummers and 350 guitar players — they all had a crack.

Joe, I know you have to go to rehearsal. Is there anything you would like to say before you head out?

I'd like to say, your grandfather is now taking drugs, and how hip can you grandfather be? I mean we've got a modern world where machines can compose music and stuff. So how hip is drugs? I think drugs are a bore. Maybe in five or ten years the rest of the nation will agree with me, but I'm trying to save a lot of people a lot of leg work, a lot of money, a lot of lungs, a lot of brain cells, and tell them now, let your grandfather take drugs and you mother take drugs because I'm sure a new generation is coming that will offer you for it, and that's what I got to say.